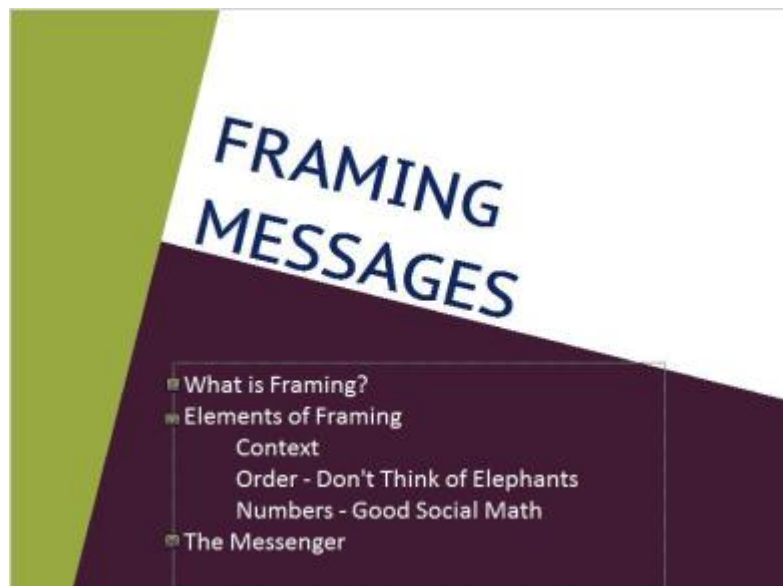
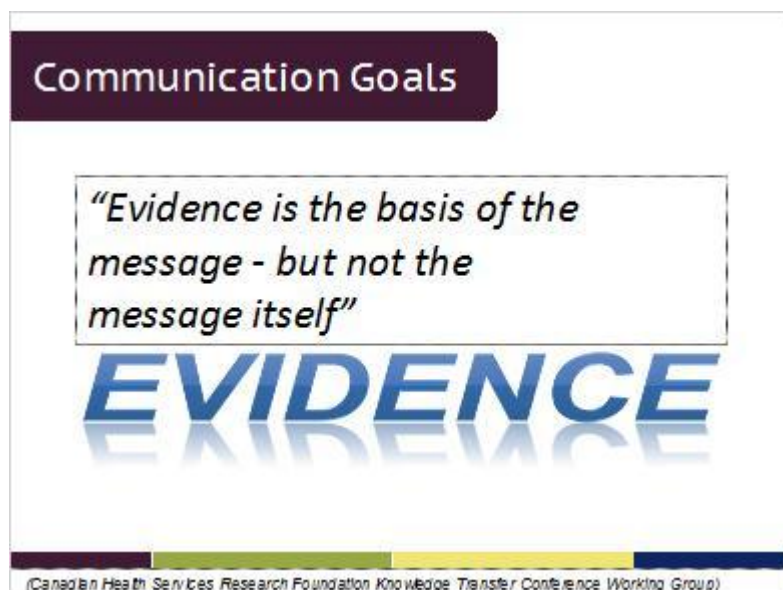


Framing Messages



In the last part of the course, you learned about knowledge brokering and heard about some successful methods for using and presenting evidence.

Communication Goals



There are many channels for information and communication, and it's so important to be able to present your evidence persuasively.....

Communication Goals Continued



Communication goals include:

- Getting the issue on the agenda by getting it in the news and in the policy debate.
- Defining the issue as a public issue drives action for change.
- Other goals include building a bigger constituency for change, and
- Marginalizing other narratives.

Achieving these goals is anything but easy.

The Frameworks Institute is one place to look for assistance. The Institute's mission is to advance the nonprofit sector's communications capacity by identifying, translating and modeling relevant scholarly research for framing the public discourse about social problems. The Institute's website is an interesting resource to explore more information about strategic framing.

What is Framing?



There is more than one way to tell any story. A huge part of communicating evidence comes down to framing the message.

What is framing?

Framing (as a tool in social movements) refers to “the conscious, strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action.”
(McAdam, McCarthy, Zald, 1996)

A frame is a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and explaining why they matter. Information has no inherent meaning until it is embedded in a context that gives it coherence and meaning. This is done through the use of narrative, metaphors, symbols, and other rhetorical devices. Together, these create a mental shortcut to explain the world.

“The way a story is told - its selective use of particular values, symbols, metaphors, and messengers - which, in turn, triggers the shared and durable cultural models that people use to make sense of their world.”
(FrameWorks Institute, 2006)

What is Framing?



For example, what do you think when you hear the term “tax burden”? How about “tax relief”? How do you react to the term “taxpayers' money” versus “government funds”? How about “public funds”?

Here is a more complicated story:

Consider two models of understanding children's mental health. They each lead to very distinct understandings, and most important, to very different ideas about how to address the problem.

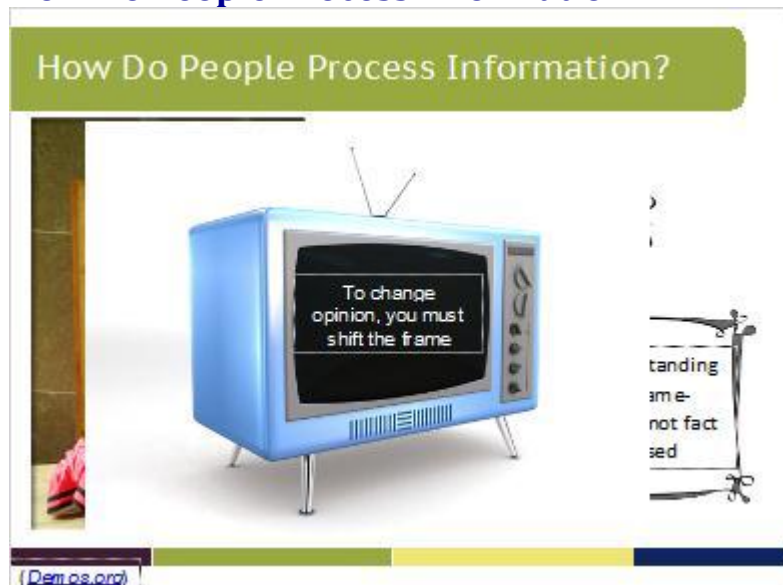
The prevalent models used by the public sees mental illness as genetic and development as set early - perhaps as early as 3 or 4. Another prevalent model is that mental health is about emotions, and people - even very young children - should be individually responsible and have control over their emotional health.

Some alternative ways of talking about this, such as models of “brain architecture” and “toxic stress” have been found effective in overcoming some of the default explanations. These alternatives both describe how genes and environments interact, and also suggest that real solutions are available.

When communication is inadequate, people default to the pictures in their heads.

When communication is effective, people can see an issue from a different perspective.

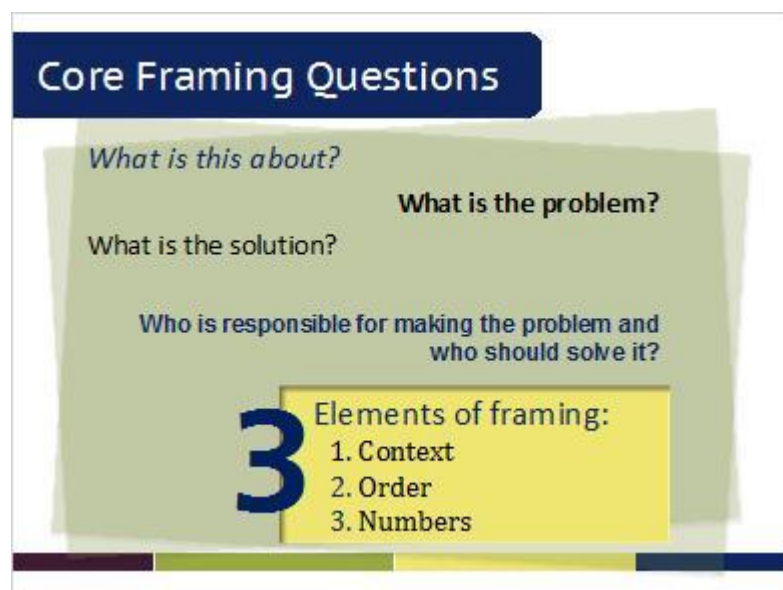
How Do People Process Information?



How do people process information? Here's a few important points to keep in mind:

- People are not blank slates
- Understanding is frame-based, not fact based
- Incoming information provides cues that connect to pictures in our heads
- People get most information about public affairs from the news media, which create "frameworks of expectation," or dominant frames
- Over time, we develop habits of thought and expectation that configure incoming information to this frame
- What this all means is: To change opinion, you must shift the frame

Core Framing Questions



When we set about to “frame” an issue - or tell a story about it, we consider the core framing questions, which include.....

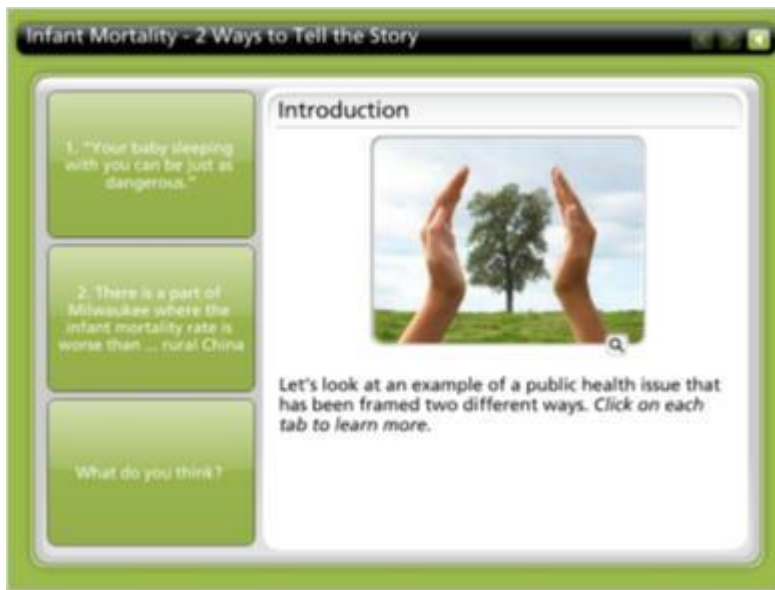
- What is this about?
- What is the problem?
- What is the solution?
- Who is responsible for making the problem and who should solve it?

A frame must answer each of these questions.

We are going to discuss three elements of framing:

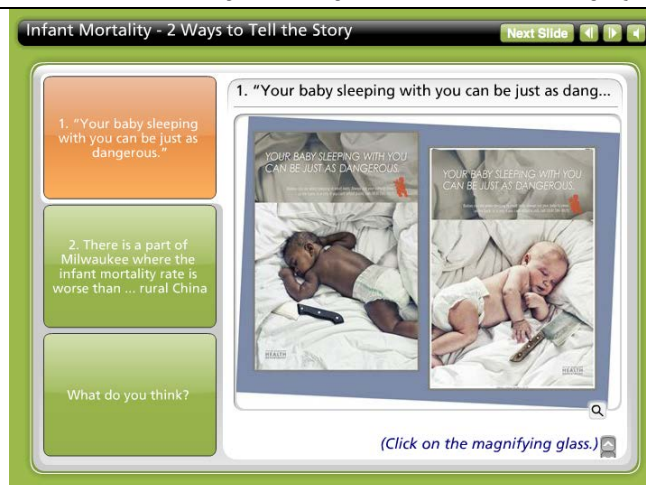
- Context
- Order, and
- Numbers.

Infant Mortality - 2 Ways to Tell the Story



Let's look at an example of a public health issue that has been framed two different ways. Click on each tab to learn more.

Infant Mortality- 2 Ways to Tell the Story (Interaction)



A recent Milwaukee advertising campaign against bed-sharing. . . depicts a sleeping baby laying next to a sharp knife with the words, "Your baby sleeping with you can be just as dangerous."

In 2011 this ad (and others like it) appeared in Milwaukee bus shelters in areas with the highest numbers of infant deaths. There had already been 9 infant deaths that year attributable to unsafe sleep environments, and co-sleeping is a frequently cited reason for the high rates of infant mortality in Milwaukee - a rate that is higher than that of 30 other countries.

Source: City of Milwaukee Health Department

Infant Mortality- 2 Ways to Tell the Story (Interaction)

Here is another way of talking about infant mortality. This is an excerpt from a National Public Radio broadcast.

“Impoverished Third World countries often find themselves at the bottom of lists when it comes to infant mortality rates. There is a part of Milwaukee where the infant mortality rate is worse than in parts of rural China. One baby dies for every 59 that make it. . . there is a direct link between a city's infant mortality and its economic health. (John Schmid) told Rachel Martin, guest host of weekends on *All Things Considered*, that there are clear correlations between infant mortality and "mothers who live with chronic anxiety, financial stress, evictions." As recently as the 1970s, Milwaukee's thriving industrial base attracted low-income workers from the South in droves. But recent globalization sent many of those jobs overseas. As Milwaukee's industry moved to China, so did its low infant mortality rate.”

Source: NPR, Dec 4, 2011

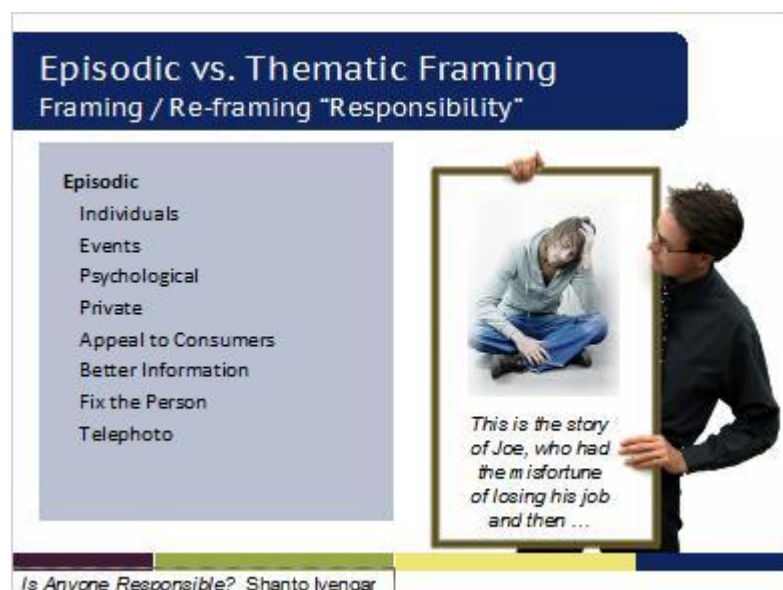
What do you think?

How are these stories different?

Which do you think is more effective?

At what? Why?

Episodic vs. Thematic Framing



Many of us who want to influence public policy are told to use individual stories to get policy makers attention. Such stories presumably make stories more accessible or more memorable. In fact, we are all trained in this technique by news journalism which has used the individual story to dramatize events since the beginning of the 20th century. The claim here is that this technique will best arouse public support for a cause and galvanize government to action.

However, there is evidence that just the opposite is the case: individual stories may be ineffectual - and may even create obstacles to substantive discussion and policy change.

In the book, *Is Anyone Responsible?* Shanto Iyengar looks at the how television news frames political issues. Typically, TV news reports on specific events or particular cases. This is **episodic framing**. Episodic framings describe concrete events - or episodes.

Episodic vs. Thematic Framing Continued

Episodic vs. Thematic Framing
Framing / Re-framing "Responsibility"

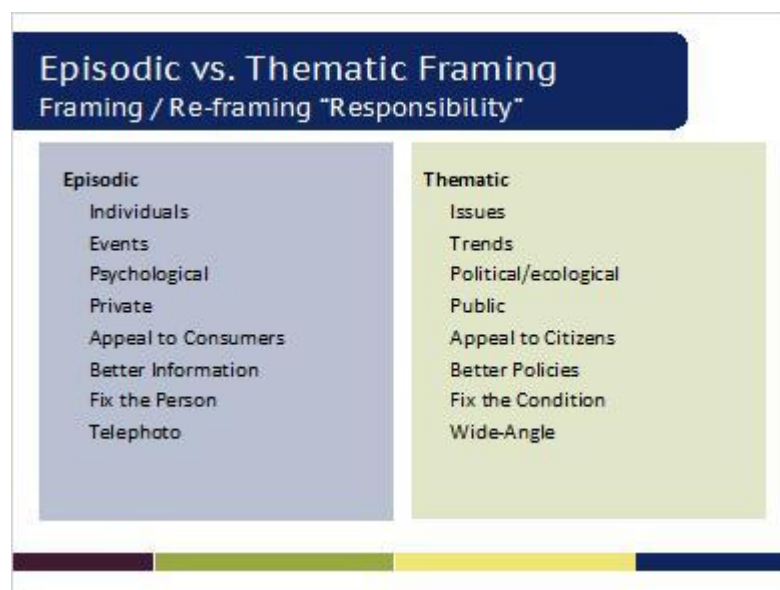
Episodic	Thematic
Individuals	Issues
Events	Trends
Psychological	Political/ecological
Private	Public
Appeal to Consumers	Appeal to Citizens
Better Information	Better Policies
Fix the Person	Fix the Condition
Tale of Joe, who had the misfortune of losing his job and then ...	Wide-Angle

In contrast, **thematic framing** describes general evidence or structural circumstances.

News presented using different frames has different consequences. Viewers shown episodic reports were more likely to consider individuals as responsible for an event, and less likely to consider society responsible. Viewers shown thematic stories had the opposite reaction: they were more likely to see social forces at work and less likely to hold individuals responsible.

In what is perhaps the most fascinating illustration of this phenomenon, Iyengar shows that subjects who viewed stories about poverty that featured homeless or unemployed people - an episodic framing -- were much more likely to blame poverty on individual failings, such as laziness or low education, than were those who instead watched stories about high national rates of unemployment or poverty - a thematic framing. Viewers of the thematic frames were more likely to attribute the causes and solutions to governmental policies and other factors beyond the victim's control.

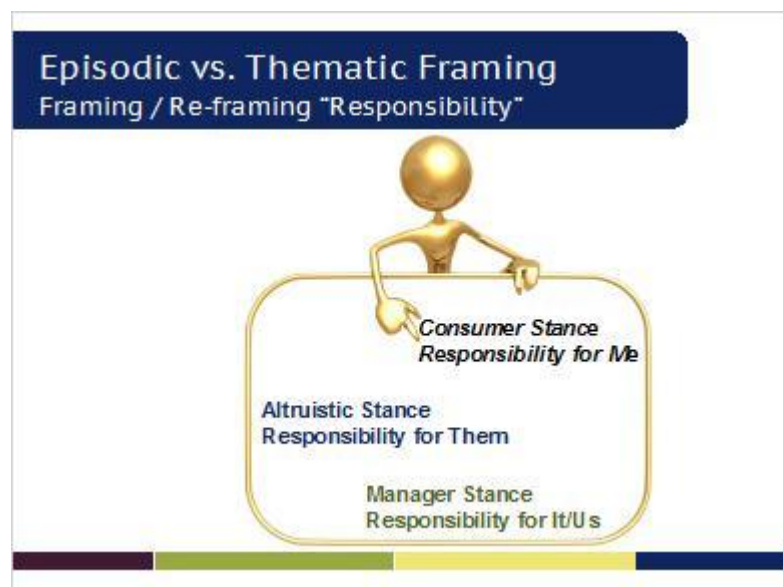
Episodic vs. Thematic Framing Continued



Why does this matter? According to Iyengar, there are many reasons episodic framing is problematic. Besides simplifying complex issues to the level of anecdote, it encourages us to see "recurring issues as unrelated events." This means it also discourages us from drawing logical conclusions about causes and consequences.

How stories are framed sets up very different kinds of policy solutions.

Episodic vs. Thematic Framing Continued



Different types of stories encourage the viewer or listener to feel a different relationship to the problem and to therefore take different stances regarding their own sense of responsibility. Too often framing appeals to us as consumers. In this case, I feel responsible only for myself and my own choices. I am barely concerned about the subject of the story, or am interested only as a viewer.

Stories can move us past this to feel sympathy for others; but while this does create a sense of responsibility for others, it also maintains a separation between ourselves and others; I can be generous in helping someone with their problem, but the problem fundamentally has nothing to do with me.

What we really want to do is to create stories that encourage the role of "manager" and help people see that we are "all in this together".

Better Storytelling



Let's look at some other issues and how they have been framed. Click on each link to explore.

Better Storytelling – Tobacco Interaction

Tobacco

Using Frames to Shift Responsibility

Demos.org

The dramatic reduction in smoking and the increase of smoke-free settings is widely viewed as one of the great public health triumphs of the recent era. But, that success was only possible once the frame was changed to shift responsibility from individuals who were making bad personal choices to a powerful industry that manipulated its customers. Only once this had happened was it possible to shift attention from changing individual behavior to changing public policies.

Drag and Drop:

Smoking: Old Frame
CHANGE BEHAVIOR

Just Say No
Individuals
Choice / Freedom
Responsibility of Parents
Vital Industry
Drug Addiction (Personal Vice)
Bad Behavior (Teens)

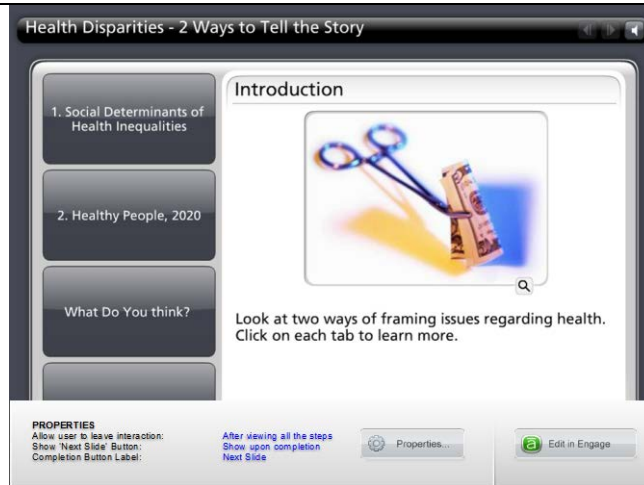
Smoking: New Frame
CHANGE PUBLIC POLICY

Defective Product
Deviant Industry
Big Money in Government
Responsibility of Government
Manipulation of Addiction
Big Tobacco

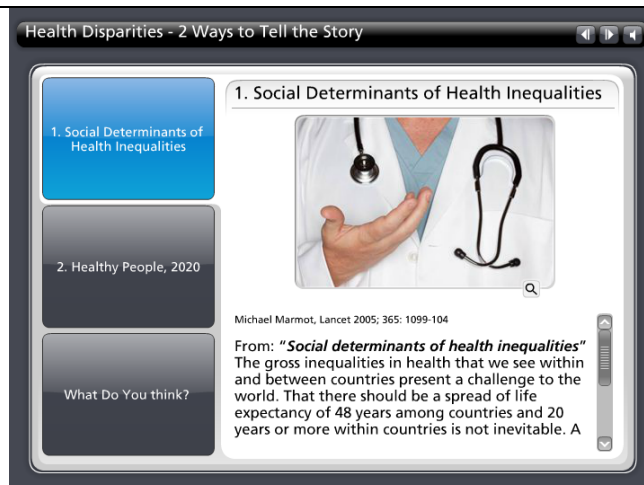
See if you can figure out which concepts belong in the past with the old frame that surrounded tobacco, and which concepts are part of the new frame. Drag and drop each item to the correct frame.

Feedback after completing interaction: In the old frame, policy efforts were geared to getting individuals to change their behavior. This was somewhat successful, but limited. The introduction of the new frame allowed changes in *public policies*. These policy changes are what has really succeeded in reducing smoking.

Better Storytelling – Health Disparities Interaction



Look at this example of framing surrounding health disparities. This interaction presents two ways of framing issues regarding health disparities. *Click on the numbered tabs to explore each approach.*

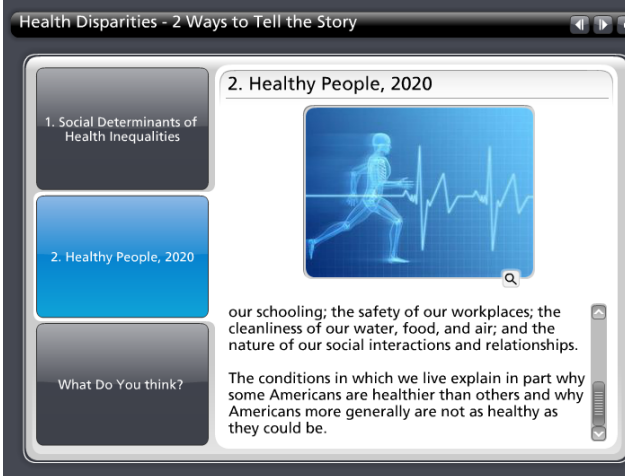


Take a moment and read this excerpt.

“The gross inequalities in health that we see within and between countries present a challenge to the world. That there should be a spread of life expectancy of 48 years among countries and 20 years or more within countries is not inevitable. A burgeoning volume of research identifies social factors at the root of much of these inequalities in health. Social determinants are relevant to communicable and non-communicable disease alike. Health status, therefore, should be of concern to policy makers in every sector, not solely those involved in health policy.”

Onscreen text or link to the summary:
<http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673605711466/abstract>
Social determinants of health inequalities; Michael Marmot, Lancet, 19 March 2005; 365: 1099-1104

Better Storytelling – Health Disparities Interaction

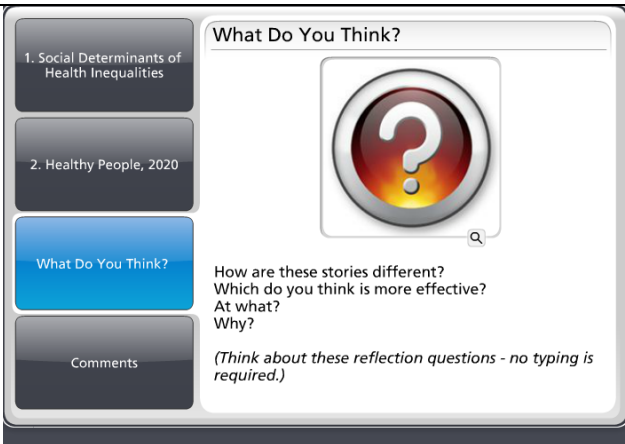


Now read this paragraph from *Healthy People, 2020*.

“Health starts in our homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities. We know that taking care of ourselves by eating well and staying active, not smoking, getting the recommended immunizations and screening tests, and seeing a doctor when we are sick all influence our health. Our health is also determined in part by access to social and economic opportunities; the resources and supports available in our homes, neighborhoods, and communities; the quality of our schooling; the safety of our workplaces; the cleanliness of our water, food, and air; and the nature of our social interactions and relationships. The conditions in which we live explain in part why some Americans are healthier than others and why Americans more generally are not as healthy as they could be.”

Source: Healthy People 2020

<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>



How are these approaches different?
Which do you think is more effective?
At what? Why?

Better Storytelling – Health Disparities Interaction

Health Disparities - 2 Ways to Tell the Story

Next Slide

1. Social Determinants of Health Inequalities

2. Healthy People, 2020

What Do You Think?

Comments

Comments

The Healthy People excerpt feels relatable.

Yes, what we do for ourselves matters, but health is also about the things we share and frequently take for granted - and that are not evenly distributed.

The Healthy People excerpt feels really relatable. Yes, what we do for ourselves matters, but health is also about the things we share and frequently take for granted – and that are not evenly distributed.

Better Storytelling – Wetlands Interaction

Wetlands - 2 Ways to Tell the Story

1. Ten Essential Steps for the Future of America's Wetlands...

2. Why Wetlands Matter

What Do You think?

Introduction

Here's an example of framing surrounding the value of wetlands. Click on each tab to learn more.

Wetlands - 2 Ways to Tell the Story

1. Ten Essential Steps for the Future of America's Wetlands...

2. Why Wetlands Matter

What Do You think?

1. Ten Essential Steps for the Future of America's We...

From the Kansas Natural Resources Council website:
Ten Essential Steps for the Future of America's Wetlands

"As citizens committed to maintaining and restoring a diversity and abundance of wetlands for future generations of people and wildlife we urge our elected officials to work to....."

... and then a dozen detailed policy and program prescriptions are listed.

There is no reason why, no value, no place for the average citizen to engage with the content that is presented. You might wonder instead, "**Why does it matter?**"

1. Ten Essential Steps for the Future of America's Wetlands

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Better Storytelling – Wetlands Interaction



2. Why Wetlands Matter

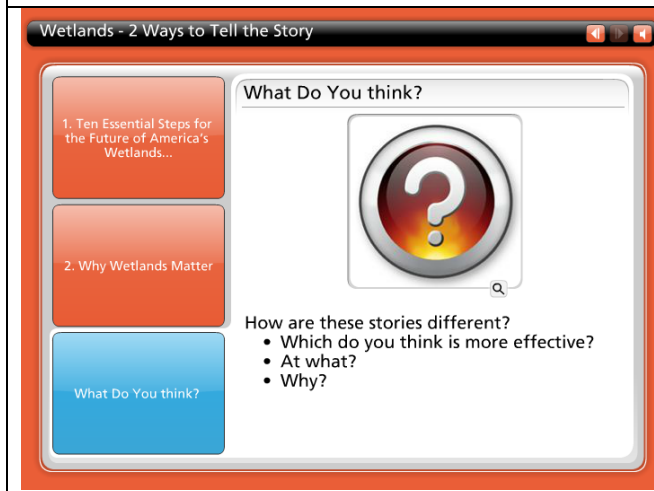
Now read this excerpt that demonstrates better storytelling:

Wetlands in Kansas benefit us all.

- Wetlands act as a filter for the waters of our lakes, rivers and streams.
- Wetlands improve the water we drink, and the air we breathe.
- Wetlands are capable of filtering pollutants such as sewage, fertilizer runoff, and heavy metals from industrial waste.
- Wetlands act like giant sponges. They soak up rain and snowmelt as they occur, serving as temporary storage basins, thus reducing erosion, and limiting the destruction caused by severe floods. Land development and the paving of large areas causes much faster runoff, thus increasing the chance of flooding.
- Wetlands provide a temporary or permanent habitat to a wealth of species of plants, fish and wildlife.

Unfortunately, Kansas' wetland system is disappearing fast and without reasonable protections we will lose the benefits they give to all of us. Fortunately, we have in place public structures, rules and systems designed to protect our wetlands.

Source: *Demos.org*



What do you think?

How are these stories different?

Which do you think is more effective?

At what?

Why?

Better Storytelling – Wetlands Interaction

Wetlands - 2 Ways to Tell the Story

Next Slide

1. Ten Essential Steps for the Future of America's Wetlands...

2. Why Wetlands Matter

What Do You think?

Comments

Comments

Why does it matter?"

The second example develops the marvelous analogy of the sponge. This is an excellent visual that helps to explain how a marsh works, why it is important and why you should care.

Comments:

In the first example, there is no reason why, no value, no place for the average citizen to engage with the content that is presented. You might wonder instead, "**Why does it matter?**"

The second example develops the marvelous analogy of the sponge. This is an excellent visual that helps to explain how a marsh works, why it is important and why you should care.

Elements of Framing: Order Matters

g:

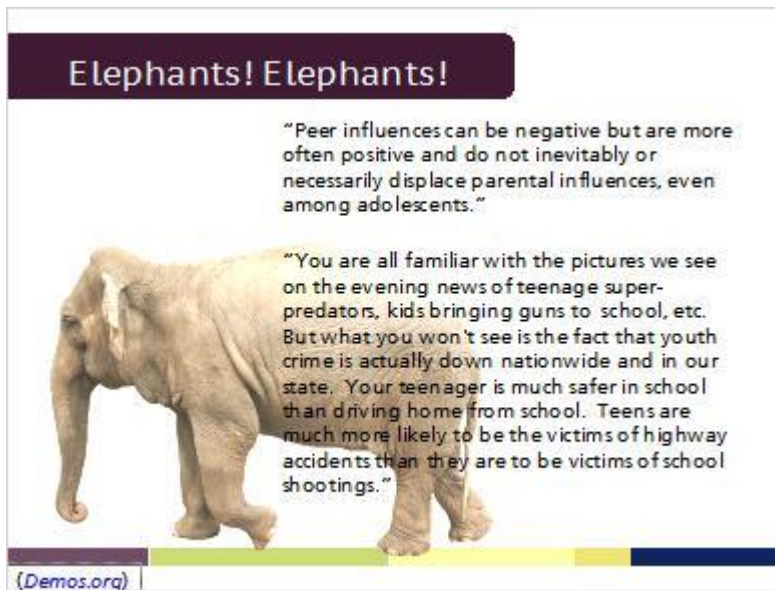
- Once a frame is established, it will dominate conversation and crowd out other frames.
- Don't repeat a bad frame, even to kill it off.
- Don't lodge your reframe in the last paragraph.

Don't Think of An Elephant, George Lakoff

Writing about politics, the linguist George Lakoff made the very useful point, “stop telling the other side's story for them.” But the point is just as useful for those of us in public health. Establish the way you want to frame the issue and stick to it. The title of Lakoff's book is, Don't Think of an Elephant. His argument is: once I tell you NOT to think of an elephant, it is all you will be able to think about. Try it: are you thinking about elephants?

So, your opponents' frame is the elephant. Don't repeat it - even to kill it off. You will just end up reinforcing that frame.

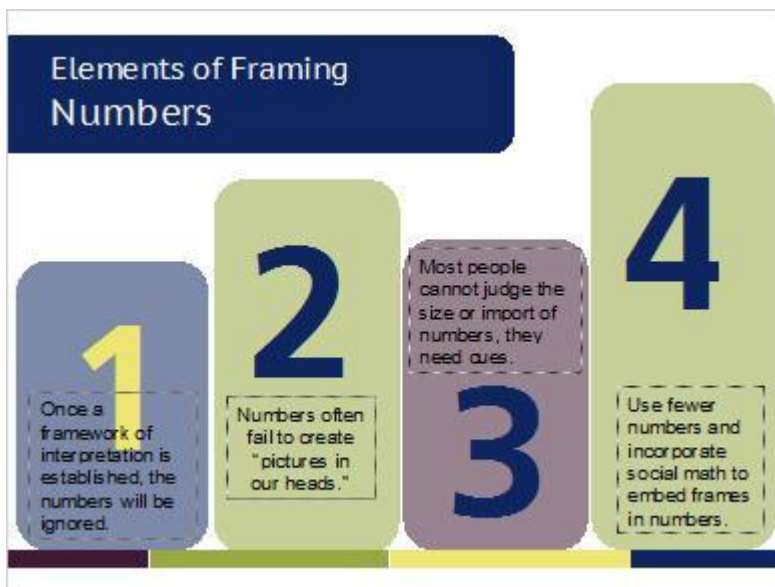
Elephants! Elephants!



What is heard here? What images are forming in your mind?

Are they positive images of achieving teens or something from the 1950s movie, *Blackboard Jungle* or S.E. Hinton's novel, *The Outsiders*?

Elements of Framing: Numbers

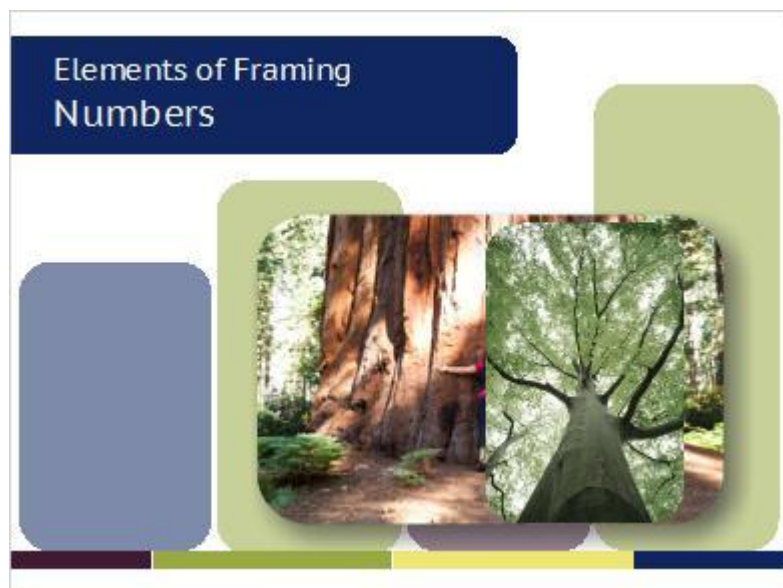


Once we have the frame established, we seek to bolster the case - often by using numbers. But:

- Once a framework of interpretation is established, the numbers will be ignored. In fact, tested a few moments after hearing or reading numbers, most people can't remember them.
- To stick, numbers need to evoke concrete images that are related in some way to people's lives and things they already know.

- Is a number a big number? A small number? We need some concrete comparisons.
- Numbers by themselves won't get the job done! Use fewer numbers and incorporate social math to embed frames into numbers.

Elements of Framing: Numbers



Another way to think about social math is to think about landscape photography. How often have you taken a picture of an enormous lake, mountain, or tree only to feel enormous disappointment when the pictures came out without the sense of grandeur that you felt when you were there? The problem is that you were in the scene at the time you experienced it - but you aren't in the picture.

Numbers - False Starts or Re-Framed?

Elements of Framing Numbers

False Start

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen from 280 parts per million to 393 ppm. over the last 150 years. The (Canadian) tar sands contain enough carbon - 240 gigatons- to add 120 ppm. Tar shale . . . contains at least an additional 300 gigatons of carbon.

[click to read Re-Framed](#)

Source for both: James Hansen, "Game Over for the Climate," NYT, May 10, 2012, p.A25.

Here is one example of using numbers. Read the “false start”.

The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen from 280 parts per million to 393 ppm. over the last 150 years. The (Canadian) tar sands contain enough carbon - 240 gigatons- to add 120 ppm. Tar shale . . . contains at least an additional 300 gigatons of carbon.

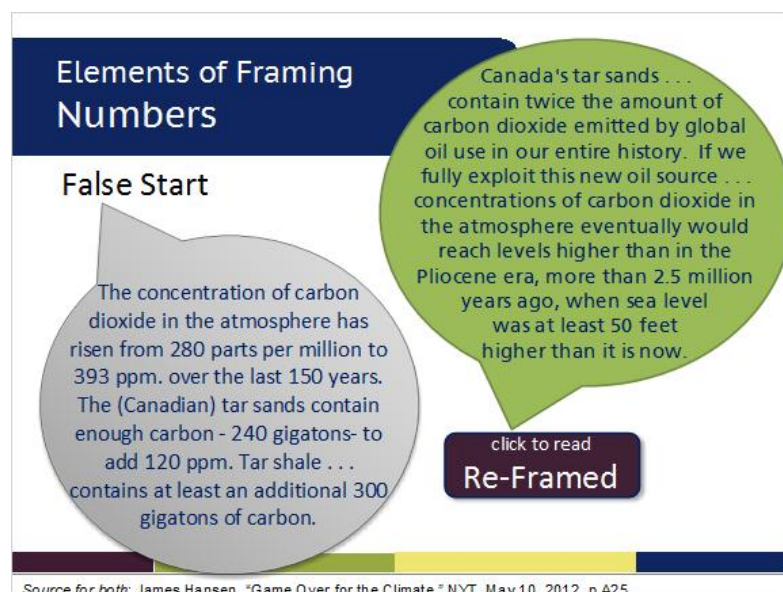
Huh? This start is just gibberish to non-scientists. A gigaton certainly sounds very big - but are 300 gigatons really a lot? To make matters worse, we are mixing parts per million and gigatons. I really don't know what is going on here.

Now read the re-framed example.

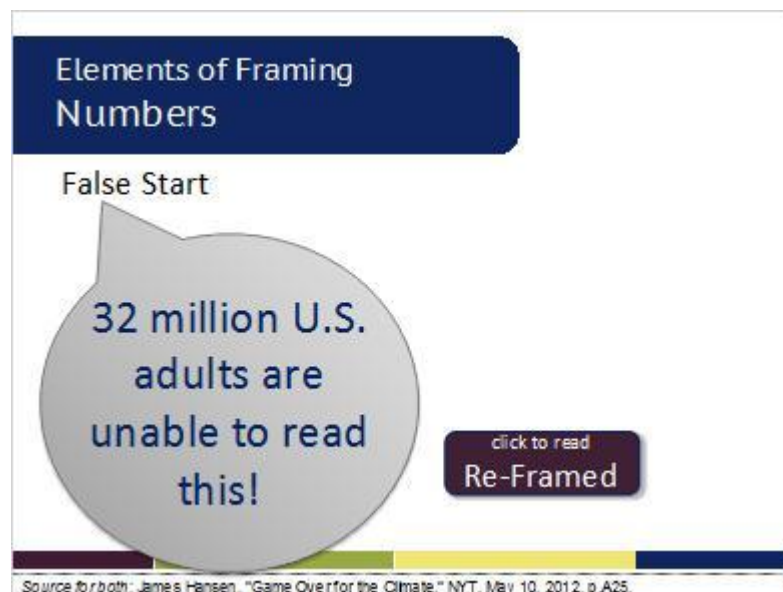
Canada's tar sands . . . contain twice the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by global oil use our entire history. If we fully exploit this new oil source . . . concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere eventually would reach levels higher than in the Pliocene era, more than 2.5 million years ago, when sea level was at least 50 feet higher than it is now.

In the re-framed example, we aren't using many numbers at all, but rather talking about the consequences.

Reframed (Slide Layer)



Numbers - False Starts or Re-Framed?



Here is another example in which there is pretty compelling framing as well as necessary perspective.

Reframed (Slide Layer)

Elements of Framing Numbers

False Start

32 million U.S. adults are unable to read this!

1 in 7 U.S. adults are saddled with such low literacy skills that it would be tough for them to read anything more challenging than a children's picture book or to understand a medication's side effects listed on a pill bottle.

click to read
Re-Framed

Source for both: James Hansen, "Game Over for the Climate," NYT, May 10, 2012, p.A25.

Which one is Re-framed?

Using Numbers

(Pick One, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

**Which one is Re-framed?
Using Numbers**

Which statement has been re-framed? Click on the circle and click the **Submit** button.

"Using technology that exists today, we could increase the average mpg of today's auto fleet to 40 mpg - the equivalent of taking 44 million cars off the road."

"In the past two decades, energy-efficiency standards kept 53 million tons of heat-trapping gases out of the air each year."

Correct	Choice
X	"Using technology that exists today, we could increase the average mpg of today's auto fleet to 40 mpg - the equivalent of taking 44 million cars off the road."

Which one is Re-framed?

Using Numbers

(Pick One, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Which one is Re-framed?
Using Numbers

Which statement has been re-framed? Click on the circle and click the **Submit** button.

"Greater numbers of children in 14 of Maine's 16 counties were living in low-income families in the past year. Today 37% of all children live in low-income families."

"A state's economic stability is threatened when large numbers of families work but can't earn enough to meet basic needs. Over 100,000 Maine children - more than the entire populations of Portland and Bangor combined - live in such working families."

Correct	Choice
X	"A state's economic stability is threatened when large numbers of families work but can't earn enough to meet basic needs. Over 100,000 Maine children - more than the entire populations of Portland and Bangor combined - live in such working families."

Good Social Math

Good Social Math

"Community fluoride protection costs less per person than a single filling." *(Centers for Disease Control)*

"The positive effect that Head Start attendance has on pre-reading skills is comparable to . . . the effect that homework has on school achievement (for older children)." *(Head Start Makes the Honor Roll," Phillips and McCartney)*

The cost of workers' health insurance exceeds the cost of steel in every new American car.

Demos.org

These are all excellent examples of social math. They put numbers in real-life, meaningful contexts.

Elements of the Frame: Messengers

Elements of the Frame: Messengers

Knowledge, credibility, trustworthiness are all key, as much as the message itself.

There's another important element of the frame.

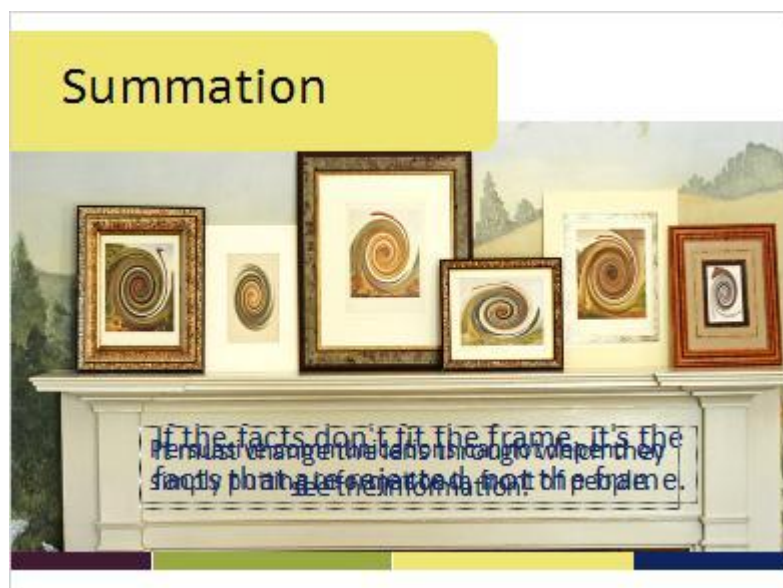
Who delivers the message matters. In fact, it can matter as much as the message itself. The messenger reinforces the message. So, credibility, knowledge, trustworthiness are all key. One important point: credibility isn't the same as likability or sameness.

Different types of people are credible in certain areas. So, there are circumstances where you want to have doctors deliver your message (they were effective messengers of health care reform). There are other places where you would want a local celebrity to deliver your message. (They are especially effective where lifestyle change is being encouraged because they serve as social models). There are places where you want a parent. It is really worth spending some time thinking through this. You do not have to be the person delivering their message all the time. You might want to parse it out to somebody who you think is the most effective.

As we've discussed in earlier sections, people are most likely to find evidence credible if it is in essential agreement with what they already believe. The corollary is that people tend to dismiss information that would falsify their convictions. Messengers can really help here. Cass Sunstein calls messengers who can break through this stalemate, "surprising validators." These are people whose message surprises you because it is not what you think it is going to be. It is easier to shake people's convictions if it is difficult to dismiss the source of information as biased or self-interested. Turn-coats, Sunstein points out, are especially persuasive. He offers as examples, a civil rights leader who opposes affirmative action, or a well-known climate change skeptic who reverses their position.

And -- using some of the tools we learned earlier about knowledge exchange, one of the best ways to determine the best messenger would be to ask some members of your intended audience who they would find trustworthy in the situation.

Summation



To summarize what we've been saying about framing: persuasive communications cannot depend on simply putting the information in front of people. It must change the lens through which they see the information. If the facts don't fit the frame, it will be the facts that are rejected not the frame.

Advocacy



This does, however, raise the question of advocacy. Where is the line between informing the policy debate by presenting evidence and outright advocacy? I think that is not an objective line, but something that is going to be very context-dependent for you, depending on where you're employed and what you're trying to do.

But I would say two things about the issue of advocacy.

One: as public health researchers, in a public health institute, public agency, or the public sector generally -- our mission is to promote public health. In my opinion, and not everyone will agree with this, nothing we do to advocate the promotion of public health is inappropriate. That is completely on our mission.

Now let me be clear. If I go to the legislature and say that Bill XYZ must be passed, that's lobbying. But to deliver pointed testimony about what the evidence says about lives saved or about epidemiological effectiveness is completely within mission.

Second: And here I'm going out farther on a limb, I would argue that the ability to successfully promote a public health agenda will depend entirely on a cultural and political context in which the discourse about the public sector and the role of government changes.

We have experienced decades of anti government discourse in which government has been framed as ineffective, corrupt, and suspect. As a result, we have reduced the capacity of and support for government, hobbling government and all its policy agendas - including public health agendas.

In my opinion: if we are to promote public health, we must simultaneously be in the business of

promoting a positive role for the public sector. Framing public health messages in ways that don't also promote faith in the public sector and in its importance are, I think, ultimately doomed to failure. These messages must be inextricably linked.

Next Steps



Congratulations on completing the five major segments of this class. We are almost through. The last segment of the course is an optional exercise. It will give you an opportunity to review - and most important - to put into practice many of the concepts we've discussed. There are no right and wrong answers, just the chance to consider how - or whether -- you would use a specific body of evidence to influence policy.